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in: Rankin/Bass

Rankin/Bass

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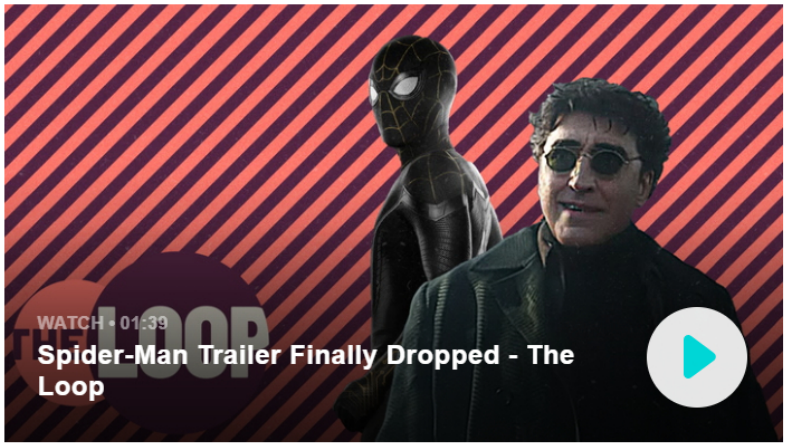

Rankin/Bass Productions, Inc. (formerly **Videocraft International, Ltd.**) was a television production company, known for its seasonal television specials and animated series such as *ThunderCats*.

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Arthur Rankin, Jr. and Jules Bass.

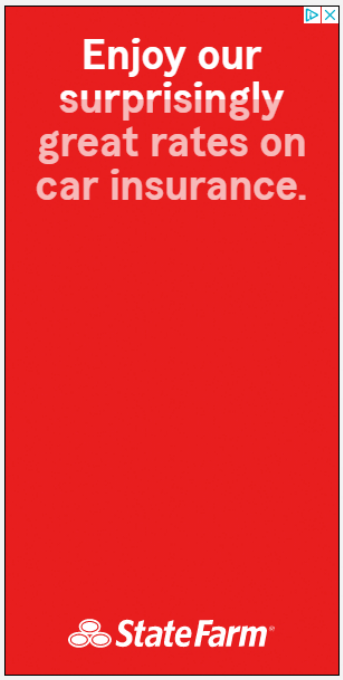
Company origins

The company was founded by Arthur Rankin, Jr. and Jules Bass in the early-1960s under the name Videocraft International. One of Videocraft's first projects was an independently produced series, *The New Adventures of Pinocchio*. The series was produced using "Animagic", a stop-motion animation process pioneered by George Pal's "Puppetoons" and Art Clokey's *Gumby* and *Davey and Goliath*.

Rankin and Bass followed the *Pinocchio* series with a traditional cel-animation series, *Tales of the Wizard of Oz*, in 1961.

Holiday tales

Videocraft produced programs themed for the Christmas holidays during the 1960s. Many of their specials, like *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, were based on popular Christmas songs.



Misfit Toys

Hermey

Heat Miser

In 1968, Greer Garson's dramatic narration carried through *The Little Drummer Boy*, set during the birth of the baby Jesus. That same year, Videocraft became Rankin/Bass Productions and adopted a new logo, although they retained a Videocraft byline in the new closing logo credit until 1971.

The following year (1969), Jimmy Durante sang and told the story of *Frosty the Snowman*, with Jackie Vernon voicing the titular snowman. 1970 brought another famous Christmas special, *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*, in which Rankin/Bass enlisted Fred Astaire as narrator Special Delivery Kluger, a mailman answering the many questions about the origins of Santa Claus.

In 1974, Rankin/Bass produced yet another popular Christmas special, *The Year Without a Santa Claus*, based loosely on Phyllis McGinley's 1956 book of the same name. Two supporting characters created for the special, Snow Miser and Heat Miser, proved to be breakout characters, to the point that they later starred in a spinoff special in 2008, *A Miser Brothers Christmas*, produced by Warner Bros. Animation.

In the late 1970s, Rankin/Bass created a few sequels to its classic specials, culminating in the feature-length *Rudolph and Frosty's Christmas in July* in 1979. Among Rankin/Bass's original specials was 1975's *The First Christmas: The Story of the First Christmas Snow* which told the story of a blind shepherd boy who longs to experience Christmas.

Their final stop-motion style Christmas story was *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, taken from the L. Frank Baum story of the same name and released in 1985. In this story, the Great Ak summons a council of the Immortals to bestow upon a dying Claus the Mantle of Immortality. When the Immortals question Claus' worthiness of the Mantle, the Great Ak tells Claus' life story, from his discovery as a foundling in the woods by the lioness Shiegra and his childhood under the care of Necile the wood nymph, his adoptive mother, to his education by the Great Ak in the cruelty and misery of the world that Claus is destined to alleviate once a year. Finally, it shows Claus as a young man accepting his destiny and taking up the cause of children's joy, fighting against the cruel King Awgwa, who does not like children or want them to be happy.

In 2001, FOX aired Rankin/Bass's first original Christmas special in sixteen years, *Santa Baby!* (like many past specials, based on a popular Christmas song), featuring voices by Eartha Kitt and Gregory Hines and featuring primarily African-American characters, a change from its previous specials.

Many of these specials are still shown on American TV stations in the present day around the holidays, and have also been released to home video. Rankin/Bass stop-motion features are recognizable by their visual style of doll-like characters with spheroid body parts, and ubiquitous powdery snow. Often, traditional cel animation scenes of falling snow would be projected over top of the action to create the effect of a snowfall.

Talent

Beginning with Burl Ives as Sam the Snowman in *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, the Rankin/Bass Christmas specials became known for their well-known star-powered narration and quirky hosting characters. This included such stars as Andy Griffith, Buddy Hackett, Angela Lansbury and Art Carney. *Pinocchio's Christmas* and *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* were the only specials without any narrators.

In addition to the 'name' talent that provided the narration for the specials, Rankin/Bass had its own company of voice actors. For the studio's early work, this group was based in Toronto, Ontario, where recording was supervised by veteran CBC announcer Bernard Cowan. This group included actors such as Paul Soles, Larry D. Mann, Billie Mae Richards (Rudolph's voice) and Paul Kligman. In later years, a mixture of New York and Hollywood talent, led by veteran voice actor Paul Frees, would be used.

Maury Laws has served as musical director for almost all of the animated films. Romeo Muller was another consistent contributor, serving as screenwriter for many of Rankin/Bass's best-known productions including *Rudolph, The Little Drummer Boy*, and *Frosty the Snowman*.

Rankin/Bass' "Animagic" stop-motion productions, as well as many of their animated productions, were animated in Japan. Throughout the 1960s, the Animagic productions were headed by Japanese stop-motion animator Tadahito Mochinaga. Starting with *Frosty the Snowman*, *MAD Magazine* artist Paul Coker was the main art director.

Many of Rankin/Bass' traditionally cel-animated works were animated by the Japanese studio Top Craft, which was formed in 1972 as an offshoot of the legendary studio Toei Animation. Many Top Craft staffers, including its founder Toru Hara (who was credited in some of Rankin/Bass' specials), would go on to join Studio Ghibli and work on Hayao Miyazaki's feature films, including *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *My Neighbor Totoro*.

Video and broadcast rights

Video and broadcast rights

The Rankin/Bass library is now in the hands of other companies. General Electric's Tomorrow Entertainment acquired the original Videocraft International in 1971. The pre-1974 library (including the "classic four" Christmas specials) remained under the ownership of GE until 1988, when Lorne Michaels' Broadway Video acquired the rights from GE. In 1995, Broadway Video's children's division became Golden Books Family Entertainment, and in turn became Classic Media (which is where the rights stand today after merging with Entertainment Rights). In 2012, Classic Media was acquired by DreamWorks Animation, which in turned was acquired by NBCUniversal in 2016. The post-1974 library, meanwhile, is currently owned by Warner Brothers, a unit of WarnerMedia.

Television rights to the post-1974 Rankin/Bass library are held in the United States by the AMC television network, where they are currently aired as part of the channel's new annual programming event, Best Christmas Ever. Meanwhile, *Santa Claus is Comin' To Town* continues to air annually on ABC, while the broadcast rights for the original *Rudolph* and *Frosty* specials are currently held by CBS. Those three specials, plus *The Little Drummer Boy*, also now air annually on the 25 Days of Christmas on Freeform. (Prior to 2018, most of the post-1974 specials had also aired as part of the 25 Days of Christmas.)

Full list of Rankin/Bass Christmas specials

Title	Narrator	Release date
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Burl Ives (as Sam the Snowman)	December 6, 1964
Cricket on the Hearth	Danny Thomas	December 18, 1967
The Little Drummer Boy	Greer Garson	December 16, 1968
Frosty the Snowman	Jimmy Durante	December 7, 1969
Santa Claus is Comin' to Town	Fred Astaire (as S. D. Kluger)	December 14, 1970
'Twas the Night Before Christmas	Joel Grey	December 8, 1974
The Year Without a Santa Claus	Shirley Booth (as Mrs. Claus)	December 10, 1974
The First Christmas: The Story of the First Christmas Snow	Angela Lansbury (as Sister Theresa)	December 19, 1975
Frosty's Winter Wonderland	Andy Griffith	December 2, 1976
Rudolph's Shiny New Year	Red Skelton (as Father Time)	December 10, 1976
The Little Drummer Boy, Book II	Greer Garson	December 13, 1976
Nestor, the Long-Eared Christmas Donkey	Roger Miller (as Speiltoe)	December 3, 1977
The Stingiest Man in Town	Tom Bosley (as B.A.H. Humbug, Esq.)	December 23, 1978
Rudolph and Frosty's Christmas in July	Mickey Rooney (as Santa Claus)	November 25, 1979
Jack Frost	Buddy Hackett (as Pardon-Me-Pete)	December 13, 1979
Pinocchio's Christmas	none	December 3, 1980
The Leprechauns' Christmas Gold	Art Carney	December 23, 1981
The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus	none	December 17, 1985
Santa, Baby!	Eartha Kitt	December 17, 2001

External links

- Rick Goldschmidt's Official Enchanted World of Rankin-Bass website

Rankin/Bass [Expand]

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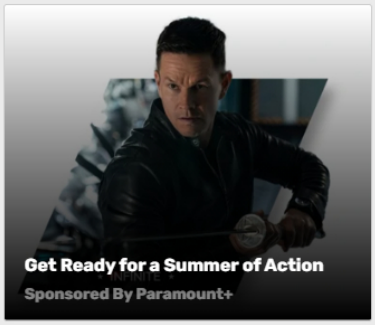

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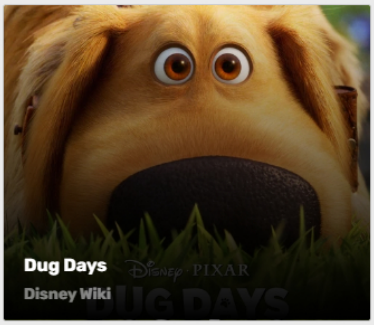

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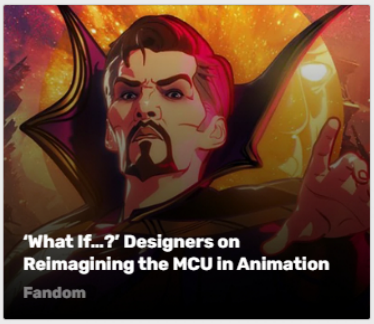

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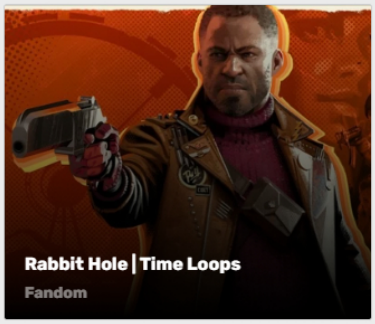

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